

## REPORT ON THE ANNUAL PRIZES GIVEN BY THE HIGHLAND SOCIETY OF LONDON

The Highland Society of London presents two awards to students at the University of the Highland and Islands – one for the best dissertation on a Highland theme (as in previous years), and one for the best creative writing portfolio (new this year). Letters from the prize winners, thanking the Society for their respective awards, have been posted in the Acknowledgement Letters section of the Society's website.

The winner of the dissertation prize is Val Ash, a Scottish History student. Her dissertation is titled "Watering down the Whisky: Alcohol, Abstinence and Temperance in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, 1820-1860." The summary of her dissertation is as follows:

*Organised temperance – as a response to the commonplace drinking habits, prevalent drunkenness and damaging consequences for the individual and society – emerged in the Highlands and Islands from the 1830s. Alcohol was associated with many aspects of Highland social and working lives, from celebratory and funereal occasions to its ritualised use in business transactions and working practices and those of illegal activities of illicit distilling and smuggling. During the period from 1830-1860, Highland societies advocated temperance principles of moderation and subsequently total abstinence. Local societies were part of a national temperance movement and a broader mid-Victorian middle class crusade of social reform. This dissertation examines the influence of temperance in altering public attitudes towards alcohol and its significance of its role in Highland society.*

The first winner of the creative writing prize is Kirstie Ross. Her creative writing portfolio is a poetry sequence that explores the theme of motherhood and family, including the following:

*"Daughter"*

*Your presence is felt by your absence  
Only in my imagination do you run  
A fever dream of what might have been  
What never was, but is ached for each day.  
Like a restless ghost, you cause anger, envy,  
Bitter taste in the back of my mouth  
And you keep me awake.  
And just as I do with my sons, who are really here,  
I wrap you, hush you, set you down to sleep,  
Say goodbye for the thousandth time.*

Kirstie Ross will be graduating on Friday 29th September in St Magnus Cathedral in Orkney, and Val Ash will be graduating on Friday 6th October at Moray College UHI in Elgin - they will both receive their prizes at their graduation ceremonies. Copies of the full version of both works are available to Members of the Society, through Annie South.